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## NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

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AN ETHICAL PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE. By Felix Adler. New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1918.

In the ethical field to-day there are few thinkers more interesting, more persuasive, and more practical than Felix Adler. Gifted with a powerful intellect of the really metaphysical type, chastened by long experience in the difficult and discouraging work of improving men's morals, possessed of a resolute soul that cannot find comfort in half-truths, Mr. Adler has labored consistently to give form and effect to spiritual reality. Such a man, it may be assumed, would not rush into print with a theory of which the premises were superficial or the conclusions irrelevant to human needs.

In point of fact, Mr. Adler's thesis is profound; and whatever may be thought of his argument, considered metaphysically, the ethical conception at which he at length arrives must be acknowledged to be a potent formula. Even those who reject, or partly reject, the proof may accept the conclusion because of its power to harmonize ideals with one another and with the realities of life.

In ethics, as divorced from religion, there are three main modes of procedure. One may begin with a general theory of the universe and deduce from this one's ethics and one's philosophy of life. This is the method that philosophy borrows from religion: it substitutes for the religious construction of the universe a philosophical construction, conceived to be more logical, but scarcely more provable and, often enough, plainly compensatory in intent. Or one may look within the mind and choose some one element of mental experience as more real and more authoritative than any other—a method that seems sound when conscience or moral intuition is selected as the final element; but that obviously has its dangers when the function fixed upon is emotion or will. Finally, one may regard ethics as a purely scientific problem, treating it as a matter of evolutionary adjustment. These methods, though not of course mutually exclusive, are fairly distinct.

To Mr. Adler evidently the scientific conception of ethics seems insufficient, even when supplemented by evolutionary theory. It is, indeed, one of the serious perplexities of this age that the greatest of scientific generalizations seems to give so little help in the solution of moral problems. Belief in the efficacy of conscious deliberation and purpose is not, to be sure, inconsistent with belief in evolution; but on the other hand evolutionary theory seems to give little if any direct assistance to conscious deliberation or purpose. We cannot rely implicitly upon past experience: to do so is to assume that what has

been must be—a doctrine directly contrary not only to common sense but to the evolutionary doctrine itself. We cannot confidently determine the direction of the future from the past because our own conscious thoughts and resolutions are a part of the evolutionary process and will influence it.

Of course, in any attempt to solve the ethical problem by subjective or by *a-priori* reasoning a whole philosophy may be implied; yet it is possible to distinguish rather sharply, as Kant did, between ethics and general philosophy. In this respect Mr. Adler seems to be a follower, though not a disciple of Kant: his method is like the method of those who rely upon the categorical imperative, or more loosely upon conscience or moral intuition. But to Mr. Adler the categorical imperative seems illogical, while conscience and moral intuition are terms of loose if not mystical meaning. Mr. Adler's treatise, however, may be roughly defined as an attempt to substitute for moral intuition something more definable and more demonstrable.

The ultimate question of ethics is the nature and meaning of human *worth*. This question, according to Mr. Adler, cannot be successfully attacked in a purely scientific or analytical manner. Underlying scientific and all other modes of thought are certain final functions of the mind: we cannot think without positing at one and the same time a *unity* and a *manifold*. When we reason from cause to effect we are really exercising these same functions in a disguised form; for we know absolutely nothing about the nature of causation itself. Hence it is argued that all reasoning which has functional finality—which is the result, that is, of the final or reality-producing functions of the mind—is equally sound. The essential difference between the method of science and that of ethics arises from the fact that in science we may assume a partial—though only a partial—correspondence between our minds and reality, and hence imperfect knowledge is trustworthy as far as it goes; while in ethics (possibly because the subject-matter is our own nature) we must have a perfect conception of the whole before we can have certain knowledge of any part. By means of "the reality producing functions of the mind," then, Mr. Adler constructs a concept of the ethical whole—a concept for which he feels justified in claiming entire validity.

"Act so as to elicit the best in others and thereby in thyself—or, more exactly, act so as to elicit the sense of unique distinctive self-hood, as interconnected with all other distinctive spiritual beings in the infinite universe." This is the supreme ethical rule which the author draws from his manifold yet unified conception of the ethical whole. As applied to various actual experiences—to the shadows of sickness, sorrow, and sin; to the relations involved in the family, in the vocations, in the state—this concept is seen to be clarifying and even inspiring. It represents, perhaps, a real advance in ethical thought. Abstract enough to fit all cases yet easily susceptible of direct application in each; connoting moreover a lofty, if paradoxical, idea of a universe in which the maximum of self-hood is reconciled with perfect altruism,—this ethical rule may well be accepted by the good as a definition of goodness.

But what of those who are not good, or those who deny altogether the validity of the conception of *worth*? The question is not now

as to the adequacy of the author's conception but as to its reality. Does not Mr. Adler's demonstration, one asks, take for granted the existence of that which he seeks to prove? If there is worth, one may agree, we must conceive it thus; but what if there be none? And again when the author declares that the conception of the ethical whole is, like the axioms of geometry, undemonstrable but verifiable, may one not suspect that the process of verification involves an appeal to something other than the "reality-producing functions of the mind"?

It is much easier, however, to find fault with metaphysical reasoning than to deny, in this case, the value of the result. Mr. Adler would make his peace with the intuitionists if he would admit that the conception of ethics which he sets forth is the result, not indeed of some mystic revelation conveyed by a faculty distinct from ordinary reason, but of ordinary reason guided by moral intuition, a force which checks and directs in some measure all human thought, urging it toward fundamental clearness, toward truth, toward righteousness.

THE INDIA OF THE FUTURE. By William Archer. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1918.

To find literary craftsmanship of a high order in a book about British colonial policy is an unexpected pleasure. Mr. Archer knows how to impart grace and charm to matter-of-fact prose; he possesses that sense of unity and proportion which saves argument from tediousness, and he reasons with a force and fairness, a point and polish, which not only carry conviction but give æsthetic delight. His treatise is neither overpoweringly authoritative nor statistically exhaustive; it presents no new or striking thesis; but it is of value as helping to clarify a great problem through common sense, through common tact and justice.

British rule in India is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, and the end is self-government—this is the truth which, seen in Mr. Archer's book from a hundred angles, chiefly impresses itself upon the reader's mind. In maintaining this view Mr. Archer knows that he runs the risk of being called by one set of critics a Little Englander, and by another a dullard incapable of understanding the superiorities of the Indian culture. He is aware that he may be subjected to a crossfire from the Imperialists and from the "Hinduizers." This knowledge, however, does not embarrass him; it merely adds a certain liveliness to his style. He is at his best in the kind of two-handed controversial exposition that his theme demands.

The races of India, Mr. Archer points out, are on the whole very high races. Physically, many of them seem to approach nearer perfection than do the European peoples. They are not to be compared with races counted inferior. "The difference between the negro and the Indian is so enormous that the comparison seems cruel to the one and insulting to the other." Mentally, the Hindus give one a sense of "high potentiality"—a sense that is partly justified by the achievements of the race in the past and by the attainments of certain individuals in the present. But this hopeful feeling is counteracted by the impression—an impression scarcely to be resisted by the European visitor—that the